BWC/MSP/2018/MX.1/WP.3

31 July 2018

English only

Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction

2018 Meeting
Geneva, 4-7 December 2018

Meeting of Experts on Cooperation and Assistance, with a Particular Focus on Strengthening Cooperation and Assistance under Article X
Geneva, 7-8 August 2018
Item 7 of the provisional agenda
Development of guidelines and procedures for mobilizing resources, including financial resources on a voluntary basis to address gaps and needs

Report on BWC Implementation Workshop Rabat, Morocco, 10-11 May 2018

Submitted by the United States of America

Summary

BWC States Parties are exploring and evaluating a range of voluntary transparency initiatives, including a number of variations on the concepts of "peer review" or "implementation review" exercises. To date, however, there has been insufficient recognition of the potential of such initiatives as a means of identifying needs and opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and assistance. This paper highlights that potential by describing an implementation workshop held as a direct consequence of the United States' participation in Morocco's May 2017 peer review exercise.

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I. Introduction

1. Morocco's National Institute of Hygiene (NIH) organized, in close collaboration with the U.S. State Department, a workshop on implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) in Morocco. The event took place from 10 - 11 May 2018 in Rabat, Morocco, and brought together more than 30 representatives from various Moroccan institutions, as well as six international participants (see Annex I).

2. The two-day workshop was carried out in cooperation with the United States and served as a follow-up activity to the peer review exercise held in Morocco in May 2017. The latter exercise was focused on implementation of the BWC in Morocco, and included around 40 national representatives of Morocco, along with 16 experts from ten other BWC States Parties, including the United States. These participants shared information and best practices about BWC implementation, and the exercise facilitated contacts among them. Among the benefits of the peer review exercise was that the United States become more aware of Moroccan needs in this area and of potential opportunities for collaboration. This led to the workshop that is the subject of this report.

3. In line with the main recommendations identified in the exercise report (see BWC/MSP/2017/WP.1), the workshop focused on the following four key issues:

- A legislation gap analysis to identify the need for further BWC implementing legislation, including consideration of the status of relevant draft legislation;
- Establishment of a national list of pathogens and toxins;
- Conduct of a BWC awareness raising campaign; and
- Establishment of an inter-ministerial body in charge of BWC implementation.

4. This report provides a brief summary of the workshop proceedings, organized according to the agenda jointly developed by the organizers (see Annex II).

II. Workshop Proceedings

Welcome Remarks and Workshop Objectives

5. In the opening session, representatives of the co-organizers made brief opening remarks. Dr. Mohamed Rhajaoui, Director of the Moroccan Institute of National Hygiene outlined the workshop's main objective, which was to develop a roadmap of actions stemming from the lessons identified in the 2017 peer review exercise. Ms. Andreea Paulopol of the U.S. Department of State expressed her appreciation to the hosts for the joint collaboration on the BWC and the decision to carry out the workshop.

State of play of the BWC in Morocco, RNBC Action Plan, Status implementation of the 2017 Peer Review Exercise

6. In the first session, representatives from the Institute of Hygiene provided an overview of the state of play of the BWC in Morocco. They shared detailed information on the existing national legislation including the regulatory framework currently in place. Furthermore, speakers made a brief recap of the 2017 peer review exercise held in Morocco, which brought together around 40 representatives from various governmental and non-governmental institutions in Morocco, as well as 16 international experts from ten States Parties and the BWC Implementation Support Unit. The presenters expressed their appreciation to the European Union (EU), Belgium, the Netherlands and France for the support provided in 2017 and reminded the audience of the specific Moroccan exercise objectives:

- To present Moroccan efforts in controlling the proliferation of pathogens;

- To allow the international experts to visit some of the most important Moroccan laboratories in order to picture the way of pathogens management in Morocco; and
- To obtain recommendations from the international experts to enhance BWC implementation.

7. Furthermore, they briefly informed about the exercise proceedings, which covered the conduct of a one-day seminar followed by two days of visits to five different institutions:

- National Institute for Safety of Food Products, Rabat;
- Animal Vaccine Production facility (BIOPHARMA), Rabat;
- Moulay Youssef Hospital, Casablanca;
- National Institute of Hygiene, Rabat; and
- Institut Pasteur du Maroc, Casablanca.

8. The first session concluded with a summary of each of the main recommendations of the peer review exercise.

National implementation of the BWC, gap analysis on legislation

9. Dr. Sonia Drobysz, Acting Programme Director for National Implementation at the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC) focused in her presentation on national implementation measures required by the BWC. She first highlighted relevant Convention provisions, most notably Article III and IV and additional agreements reached by Review Conferences. She elaborated on specific measures that States Parties need to adopt in order to implement the Convention. Furthermore, she informed about different approaches taken by States Parties on the enactment of domestic legislation for the BWC, such as 'stand-alone' laws on specific BWC-related issues, laws covering all weapons of mass destruction, and the implementation of respective Convention obligations through several laws and regulations.

10. Dr. Drobysz then presented the outcome of a legislative study done by VERTIC in 2013 on Moroccan legislation based on information available in the public domain. She noted that even though certain national laws and regulations could be relevant to some aspects of BWC implementation, there was no specific legislation in force to address illegal activities with biological and toxin weapons and to control peaceful activities with biological agents and toxins in Morocco, including legislation on biosafety and biosecurity. Dr. Drobysz concluded her presentation by stressing the benefits of national implementation and informing about the work undertaken by VERTIC. In this context, she shared information about specific tools developed by VERTIC, such as the BWC legislation database, sample legislation, regulatory guidelines, and other tools for implementing the BWC.

11. In her second presentation, Dr. Drobysz focused on the role and functions of a national authority for the BWC. In accordance with the recommendation of the Sixth Review Conference, States Parties are encouraged to designate a national focal point for coordinating national implementation of the Convention and communicating with other States Parties and relevant international organizations. Furthermore, she provided information on the potential structure and composition of an inter-ministerial body.

Development of a high consequence pathogens and toxins list

12. Ms. Natalie DeGraaf of the Global Program, Division of Laboratory Systems at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) spoke about the development of a high consequence pathogens and toxins list. She presented the main components of a national biosafety and biosecurity system, pointed out the different approaches that States

Parties have taken to create a national oversight system, and presented select national examples.

13. In her first presentation, Ms. DeGraaf emphasized critical decisions that need to be taken when creating an oversight system, such as determining the type of laboratories and other activities that are to be monitored and the specific oversight options to be chosen. Approaches vary and range from merely passive information collection methods to active ones that also include national on-site inspection components to verify the information provided. Ms. DeGraaf also informed about different national or international standards that could be used in the development of a biorisk oversight programme. In this context, she pointed out specific challenges to developing and implementing national oversight programmes and means to overcome them. She concluded her presentation by emphasizing that there is no 'one-size fits all' approach and that each state has to develop its own unique national system.

14. Ms. DeGraaf's second presentation focused on different types of high consequence pathogens and toxins lists, with a view to facilitating discussions in the subsequent working group on the same issue. She presented models adopted by different countries in which the number of agents vary between 20 and more than 250 pathogens and toxins. Ms. DeGraaf also highlighted a number of criteria for inclusion/exclusion and discussed the approach of using a scoring system in order to facilitate the process of deciding on including or excluding individual pathogens or toxins.

National inventory of dangerous pathogens

15. In the afternoon session of the first day, Ms. Sabrina Brizee of the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) presented the Dutch national inventory of dangerous pathogens. She explained the Dutch national approach towards biosafety and biosecurity and informed about tools such as the 'biosecurity self-scan toolkit' and 'vulnerability scan' that were developed by RIVM and are freely available on its website. The national inventory is a centralized, electronic database, with dedicated software, providing a comprehensive overview of all laboratories handling dangerous pathogens at the national level, and should not be confused with an institutional-level inventory. A national inventory can serve as a tool for policy development and biopreparedness and help countries to comply with international regulations such as the BWC.

16. Such a system is still not in place in many countries but is recommended in a large number of World Health Organization Joint External Evaluation (WHO JEE) reports. RIVM has relevant experience and the dedicated software, and intends to develop an autonomous instrument to help other countries independently set up their own inventories of dangerous pathogens. Ms. Brizee described a project in which RIVM is working on establishing a national inventory in the Republic of Uganda, an effort that was positively acknowledged by the WHO in its JEE in Uganda as an indicator for biosafety and biosecurity. Within the framework of the Global Partnership Program, RIVM is currently reaching out to other countries in East Africa, such as Tanzania and Kenya, to facilitate the implementation of such a database.

17. Ms. Brizee then went on to present the process of implementing a national inventory of dangerous pathogens, with four key steps: 1. identify government and other stakeholders to implement an inventory; 2. mandate to contact and map relevant laboratories; 3. data collection, management and maintenance of the database; and 4. update the relevant ministries about the outcome of the database, which subsequently can be used for developing national biosafety/biosecurity policies.

BWC awareness raising

18. Mr. Scott Davis, Deputy Director of the Biological Policy Staff, Bureau of International Security & Nonproliferation of the U.S. Department of State presented on BWC awareness raising in the United States. Mr. Davis elaborated on awareness-raising measures that his country has put in place with regard to various aspects of BWC implementation – export controls, biorisk management, and the oversight of science. He particularly noted the growing concern about dual-use research of concern (DURC) and the consequent need to raise awareness about this problem, highlighting a number of government policies that the United States has enacted for this purpose and emphasizing that the U.S. government draws for this purpose on expertise from the scientific community.

19. Mr. Davis stressed the importance of creating a culture of responsibility and shared information on specific U.S. approaches that include both governmental and non-governmental efforts. He pointed out the specific communities that U.S. outreach and education efforts target, including industry, academia, other research, public health, first responders, and the amateur biology community. This includes partnerships developed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to garner assistance in preventing, detecting and responding to incidents of misuse.

III. Recommendations and Next Steps Identified by the Working Group Discussions

20. After these presentations, which were aimed at familiarizing workshop participants with national best practices and examples in the areas of priority for the workshop, experts regrouped into two smaller working groups that were held in parallel. These groups had the main objective of developing concrete recommendations and identifying next steps to strengthen BWC implementation in Morocco. The participants identified the following main recommendations, including next steps.

Legislation gap analysis and draft legislation

- Participants strongly recommended completing a legislation gap analysis, building upon the work done by VERTIC in 2013. The analysis should take stock of existing legislation and draft bills such as those on pathogens and toxins, public health, transport of infectious substances, and controls on exports of dual-use items.
- Furthermore, participants recommended the drafting of detailed legislation on biosafety and biosecurity, on the basis of the existing draft bill on pathogens and toxins. In this context, some experts also suggested the value of analyzing relevant legislation in place in other States Parties, such as France or Belgium.
- Experts exchanged some initial views regarding the identification of a potential leading entity for the process.

List of high consequence pathogens and toxins for Morocco

- Workshop participants developed a first draft list of human pathogens, human/animal pathogens, and toxins. Experts agreed to use the list as a basis for further consideration among the various national stakeholders.
- It was suggested that the first consolidated version of the list will be shared with CDC for feedback.

Inter-ministerial Committee

- Participants agreed that one of the main workshop conclusions was the need for a multidisciplinary approach to implement the Convention provisions.
- Representatives discussed various options to establish an inter-ministerial committee, including an informal approach that builds upon existing arrangements, as well as the establishment of a formal structure regulated through a legal decree.
- Experts noted the potential benefit of looking into the domestic implementation approach taken for the Chemical Weapons Convention and adjusting it to apply for BWC requirements.
- Participants also emphasized the importance of convening meetings like this implementation workshop on a regular basis. In this context, they also noted the benefits of the peer review workshop in 2017, as it brought together various national stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Convention.
- It was suggested that Moroccan authorities designate the National Institute of Hygiene as a national focal point to coordinate activities related to BWC implementation.

BWC awareness raising campaign

- Experts underlined the criticality of a BWC awareness raising campaign and considered those persons working with and transporting pathogens as a key target group.
- Participants noted the valuable work done by Moroccan NGOs, such as the Moroccan Biosafety Association (MOBSA/AMABIOS) and the Association Marocaine de Biosécurité (AMBS), which conduct "caravans" and other outreach activities in relevant institutions and venues, such as universities.
- Representatives took note of the fact that Morocco has gained considerable experience through recent awareness raising campaigns conducted in the context of major disease outbreaks.
- While arguments in favor of approaches that are both centralized (e.g., directed by the government) and decentralized (e.g., with initiative taken by a wide range of entities, such as universities, NGOs, and industry) were discussed, experts underlined the importance of not excluding either approach.
- Some participants also saw a potentially important role for an inter-ministerial body in ensuring a coordinated, cross-sectoral awareness raising campaign.
- Participants suggested a high-level conference including key policy makers and international experts as an option to draw further attention to the BWC's requirements.

IV. Conclusions

21. Participants noted the great benefit of the two-day workshop and expressed their appreciation to the National Institute of Hygiene of Morocco and the U.S. Department of State as the main organizers of the event. Many said that the workshop objectives were met and that the proceedings were carried out in a very open, all-inclusive, and constructive manner. While work remains to be done, participants noted that another important step had been taken by following up on the lessons identified in the peer review exercise in 2017. Participants expressed their hope for a continued collaboration among Moroccan stakeholders and with international experts in the future in order to facilitate the full and

effective implementation of the BWC in Morocco. For its part, the United States concluded that such exercises are valuable, both as a means to strengthen implementation in specific States Parties and as an example for other Parties; that direct cooperation between and among Parties is an important way to strengthen the BWC; and that we can continue this process with further assistance to Morocco in filling gaps in its legislation implementing the Convention.

Annex I

Participating Institutions in the BWC Implementation Workshop

1. The following governmental institutions and non-governmental entities from Morocco participated in the event:

- Ministry of Health: National Institute of Hygiene; Hospital Directorate; Pharmacy and Drug Control Directorate; Directorate of Epidemiology and Disease Control; Direction de la Règlementation et du Contentieux;
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation;
- Ministry of Interior: Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale, General Directorate for Civil Protection;
- Ministry of Foreign Trade;
- Administration de la Défense Nationale
- Forces Armées Royales;
- Gendarmerie Royale;
- Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research: Directorate of Scientific Research, National Center for Scientific and Technical Research (CNRST);
- Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Fishing: National Office for the Safety of Food Products;
- Veterinary vaccine production company (BIOPHARMA); and
- Moroccan Biosafety Associations: MOBSA and AMBS.

2. Representatives from the following international institutions attended the event:

- United States Department of State;
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States;
- National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, The Netherlands;
- Verification Research, Training and Information Centre; and
- Implementation Support Unit for the Biological Weapons Convention.

Annex II
Workshop Agenda

10 May 2018

8:45-09:00	Welcome Remarks and Workshop Objectives Dr. Mohamed Rhajaoui: Director of the INH, Morocco Ms. Andreea Paulopol, U.S. Department of State
9:00-10:30	State of play of the BWC in Morocco (Morocco), led by INH RNBC Action Plan (Morocco) Status implementation of the recommendations of the 2017 Peer-review exercise (Morocco), led by INH Legislation gap analysis Draft Legislation National pathogens list BWC Awareness raising campaign Inter-ministerial body
10:30-10:45	Coffee break
10:45-12:30	VERTIC and CDC presentations Implementing measures for the BWC and approaches to national implementation VERTIC's survey of Morocco's implementing legislation for the BWC VERTIC legislative drafting assistance and tools CDC pathogen list drafting and implementation
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:30-17:00	RIVM and U.S. Department of State Presentations Working Groups Discussion on next steps to strengthen BWC implementation Legislation Gap analysis and Draft Legislation, led by VERTIC, CDC, RIVM and DRC Ministry of Health BWC Awareness raising campaign, led by U.S. Department of State and ONSSA

11 May 2018

09:00-12:00	Working Groups Discussion (2 working groups) National pathogens list, led by CDC and INH Inter-ministerial body, led by VERTIC and MAECI Morocco
12:00-13:00	Lunch
13:00-15:00	Report from Working Groups
15:00-17:00	Discussion on next steps and action plan